

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

By Bonnie Jernigan

It's Official: The Rural & Historical Society Gets a New Home

Move over King Caesar House. Your spot as the Duxbury Rural and Historical Society flagship is about to be eclipsed by the Nathaniel Winsor Jr. House. For years the elegant Powder Point home of 19th century shipping magnate Ezra Weston Jr., aka King Caesar, has been the Rural and Historical Society showplace of choice, but with the federal style mansion built by Weston's contemporary and friend Nathaniel Winsor opening as a place for exhibits and meetings, we have another testament to the Duxbury's wealth in its heyday as a shipping center during the early 1800s, and it is a humdinger.

A ceremony dedicating the Washington Street landmark as the new DRHS headquarters takes place this Saturday morning, October 21, at 11. Public officials will speak, the Duxbury High School Chamber Singers will perform, and light refreshments will be served on the veranda overlooking the harbor, celebrating the move of the Rural and Historical Society offices from cramped quarters at the Drew House. Everyone is invited to the party, in recognition of the support and efforts of countless members and volunteers who have made the opening possible.

Built in 1807 by prosperous shipbuilder Nathaniel Winsor Jr. as an elegant bayside home for his family, the stunning three-story house had been owned by several generations of Winsor descendants until 1893, then served a variety of purposes during the 20th century, including private residence as well as boarding house and a hotel that counted Buckminster Fuller and wicked-witch-of-the-West actress Margaret Hamilton among its guests.



DRHS Patrick Browne at work with volunteer Marion Martin at the Nathaniel Winsor Jr. House

After the Rural and Historical Society purchased the property in 1997, the Nathaniel Winsor House was the center of attention, first as a short-lived but stormy controversy brewed over circumstances surrounding the acquisition, then as the house attracted thousands of visitors to a spectacular 1998 decorator showcase featured in "Traditional Home" magazine.

Since that time, however, the Nathaniel Winsor House has been somewhat out of the spotlight. Now the showplace is ready to return to center stage, according to DRHS Executive Director Patrick Browne, whose office is upstairs in the gorgeous new headquarters. Although most of the appointments that may be remembered from the decorator showcase actually belonged to the designers and were removed after the event, many of the spectacular wall and window treatments remain. Browne says a gift from a major donor has made it possible to furnish the house in a manner appropriate to both the style of the period and the status of its original owner.

Shipbuilder's Status Symbol

Nathaniel Winsor Jr., a member of the third generation of a prominent Duxbury shipping family at a time when Duxbury was a thriving center of shipbuilding and sea trade. By 1807, the year he built his house, Nathaniel was instrumental in his family's industry, and his house was meant to reflect his means as well as his elegant tastes. A master carver of ship's figureheads, he is thought to have fashioned the mantles, as well as the magnificent Egyptian-influenced gilt mirror in the front hall. Intricate and well-preserved wood-carved details remain throughout the house, but only one piece of original furniture is present—Nathaniel Winsor's chair, on loan from the Beal family, who are Winsor descendants. Interior designer David Beal had the distinction of designing the dining room in a dwelling

built by his great-great-great-grandfather for the decorator showhouse two years ago.

Large open rooms on the first floor as well as ample space for administrative offices upstairs, plus dedicated off-street parking and easy access and visibility in the center of the community make the new DRHS headquarters a perfect place for public programs and activities, says Browne. Space was limited at the old Drew House, and the King Caesar House is set up as a house museum, making it less than ideal for gatherings and meetings. At some point, the Nathaniel Winsor Jr. House will probably be available for other community groups to use, and eventually, even be open to private functions.

Browne is already at work organizing a series of informal "parlor talks" to be held at the new headquarters. A discussion on dateboards is in the works. The Society issues dateboards for any structure in town that can be documented as being at least 100 years old. Browne is looking forward to getting his first dateboard application for a twentieth-century building.



Graduate Degree

Sarah Hannan of Onion Hill Road was recently awarded a graduate certificate in nonprofit management from Northeastern University. A program director for South Shore Art Center in Cohasset, Hannan attended six graduate-level classes at Northeastern's part-time division to earn the certificate. "It was a wonderful experience," she says. "The best part was meeting other non-profit 'types' who were experiencing similar successes and failures. A positive year—I will miss it."



Artists Grant Applications

The Massachusetts Cultural Council is accepting applications for artist grants in the categories of music composition, traditional arts, playwriting, crafts, photography, sculpture/installation and film and video. Recipients will be awarded \$25,000; finalists will receive \$1000. Applications and guidelines are available by phoning 617-356-1540.